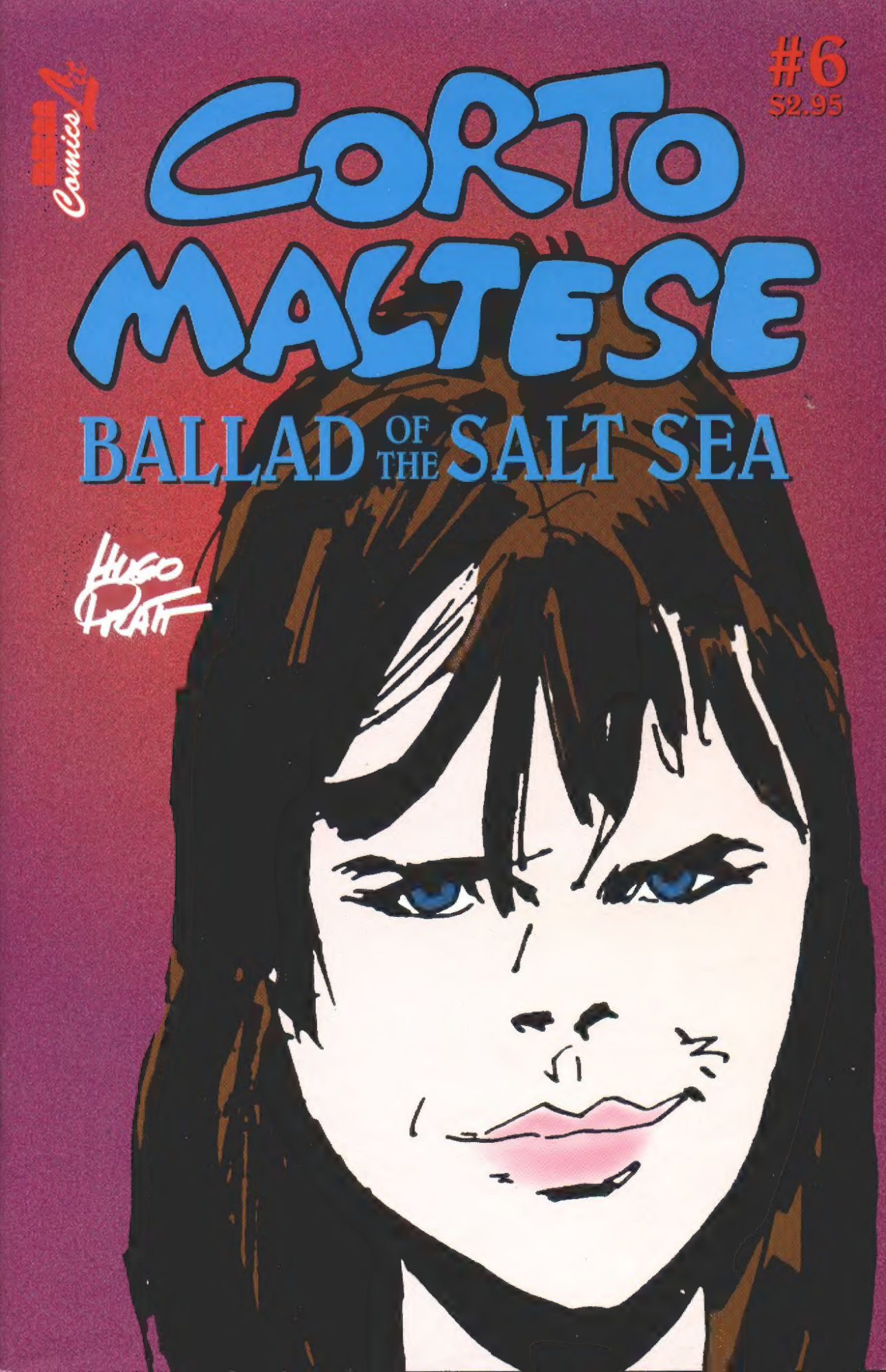
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CORTO MALTESE
BALLAD OF THE SALT SEA
HUGO PRATT

SUMMARY

Pandora manages to flee captivity from the Monk's island which the Germans use as a base for their raids, leaving Cain behind. Corto turns out to be OK after a long period of absence from being thrown off a cliff by the Monk. He and Cain are now left alone on the island to deal with the irrascible Rasputin.

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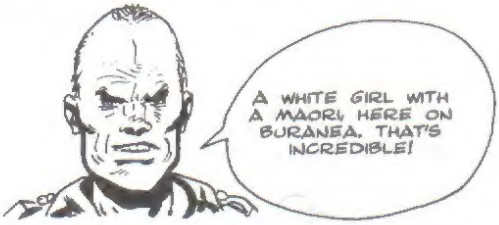
GOOD GOD! A WHITE GIRL!

QUICK, SOMEONE FETCH THE DOCTOR. THEN INFORM THE COLONEL. QUICK! STOP STANDING THERE LIKE IDIOTS. GET ON WITH IT!


A WHITE GIRL WITH A MAORI HERE ON BURANEA. THAT'S INCREDIBLE!

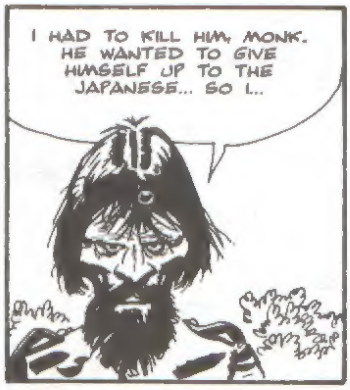
HUGO PRATT

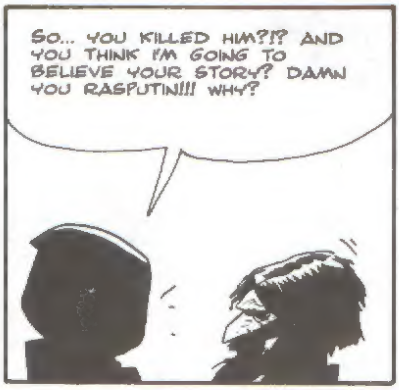
SHORTLY...
SO, IT'S TRUE. HOW ON EARTH DID YOU WIND UP HERE? I MEAN... DAMN IT, WHO ARE YOU AND WHERE DO YOU COME FROM?
I AM PANDORA GROOVESNORE AND HE'S TARAO, A FRIEND WHO'S SAVED MY LIFE SEVERAL TIMES...

WE HAVE COME FROM ESCONDIDA, THE MONK'S ISLAND, WHERE I WAS HELD PRISONER WITH MY COUSIN, CAIN GROOVESNORE. THE GERMANS ARE USING THE ISLAND AS A BASE FOR THEIR RAIDS AND...
PANDORA GOES ON WITH HER STORY...

MEANWHILE, ON ESCONDIDA...
RASPUTIN, WE'VE BEEN WITHOUT ANY NEWS FOR TWO WEEKS. YOUR EXCUSE DOESN'T HOLD WATER... THE RADIO WORKS!

BUT... I HAVEN'T SEEN CRANIO, WHERE IS HE?


I HAD TO KILL HIM, MONK. HE WANTED TO GIVE HIMSELF UP TO THE JAPANESE... SO I...


SO... YOU KILLED HIM?!? AND YOU THINK I'M GOING TO BELIEVE YOUR STORY? DAMN YOU RASPUTIN!!! WHY?

HE WAS GOING TO MUTINY. BELIEVE ME! IT'S THE TRUTH!

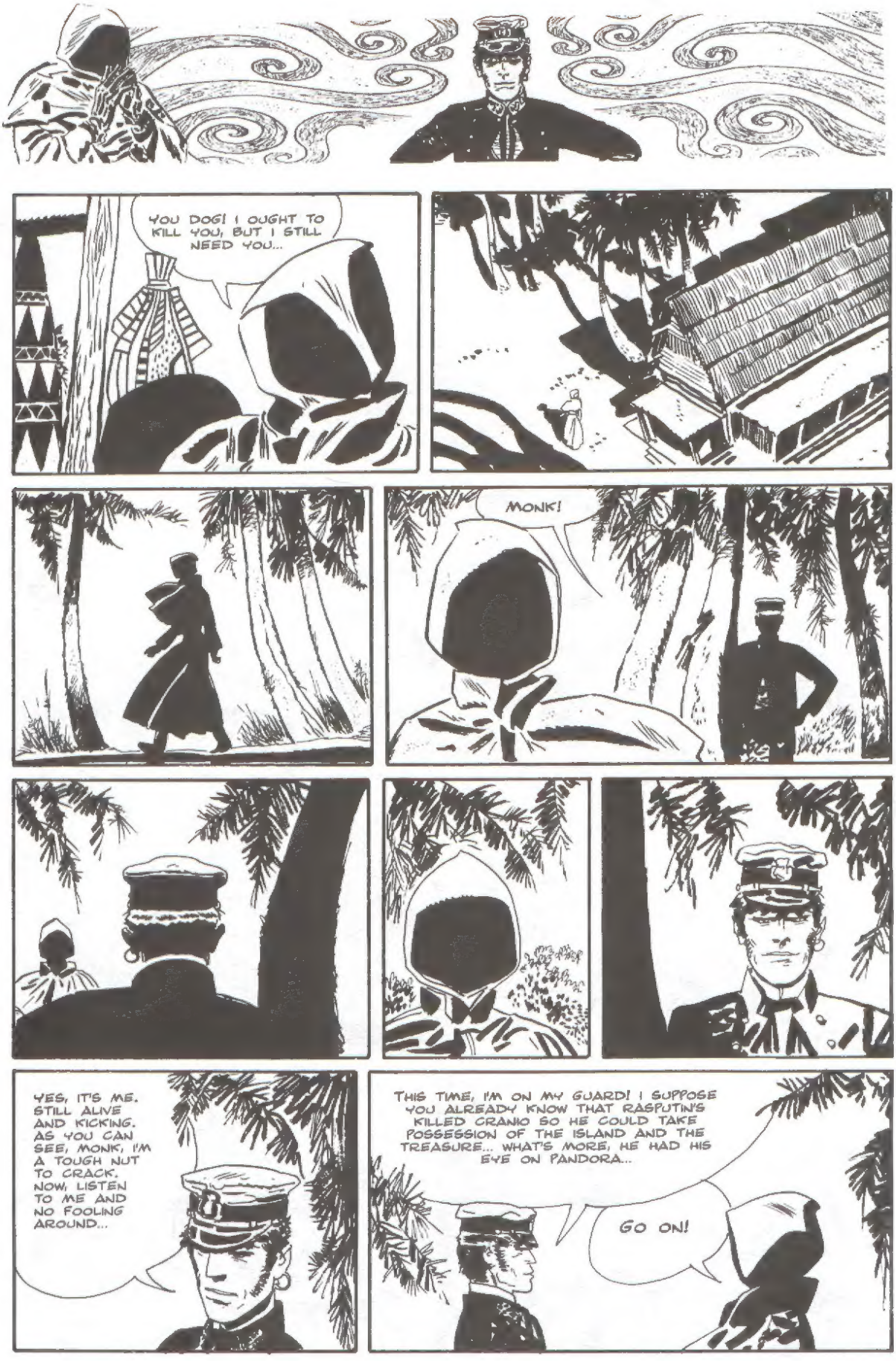
CRANIO ANNOYED YOU, THAT'S WHY YOU KILLED HIM. JUST THANK YOUR LUCKY STARS...

...THAT I STILL NEED YOU. BUT ONE MORE MISTAKE AND YOU'RE A DEAD MAN!

WHERE ARE THE GROOVESNORE CHILDREN?

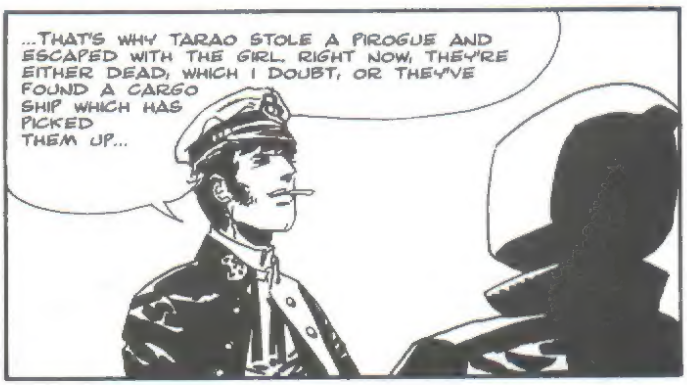
THEY'VE DISAPPEARED... ALONG WITH THE YOUNG MAORI. WE'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR THEM EVERYWHERE BUT IT'S AS IF THEY'VE VANISHED INTO THIN AIR.

THE TWO GROOVES-NORES HAVE VANISHED AND YOU JUST CALMLY TELL ME THE NEWS! COME BACK TO THE RESIDENCE SO THAT WE CAN HAVE A LITTLE CHAT!


YOU DOG! I OUGHT TO KILL YOU, BUT I STILL NEED YOU...
MONK!
YES, IT'S ME. STILL ALIVE AND KICKING. AS YOU CAN SEE, MONK, I'M A TOUGH NUT TO CRACK. NOW, LISTEN TO ME AND NO FOOLING AROUND...
THIS TIME, I'M ON MY GUARD! I SUPPOSE YOU ALREADY KNOW THAT RASPUTIN'S KILLED CRANIO SO HE COULD TAKE POSSESSION OF THE ISLAND AND THE TREASURE... WHAT'S MORE, HE HAD HIS EYE ON PANDORA...
GO ON!

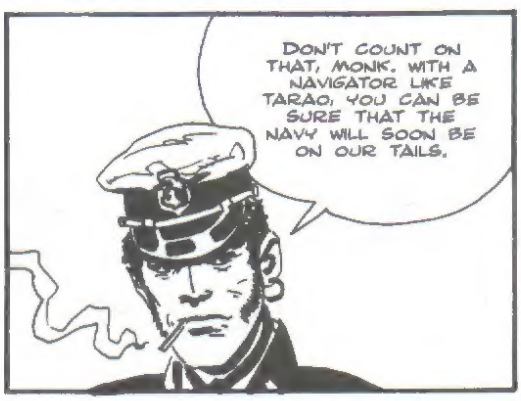
SINCE THE FRACTURE WHICH I GOT FROM FALLING FROM THE CLIFF HADN'T MENDED YET...

...I COULDN'T DEFEND THE CHILDREN AGAINST THAT LUNATIC RASPUTIN...

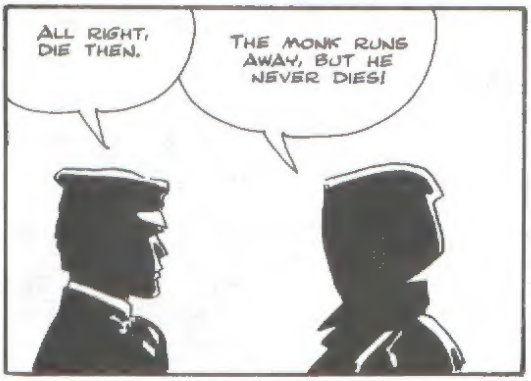

...THAT'S WHY TARAO STOLE A PIROGUE AND ESCAPED WITH THE GIRL. RIGHT NOW, THEY'RE EITHER DEAD, WHICH I DOUBT, OR THEY'VE FOUND A CARGO SHIP WHICH HAS PICKED THEM UP...

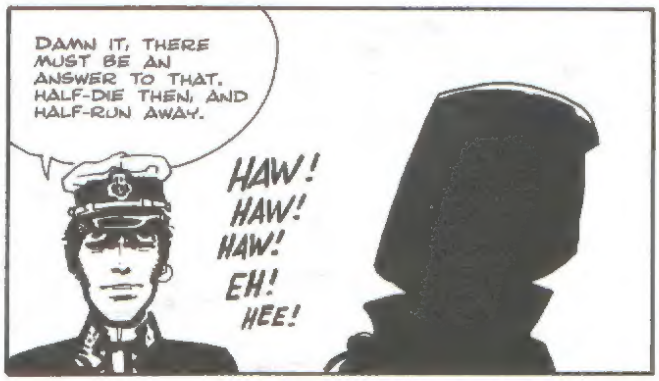
AND SO THIS ISLAND'S IN DANGER!

WE'LL HAVE TO ABANDON IT.
THEY WON'T NECESSARILY FIND US AT ONCE. IT COULD TAKE THEM MONTHS!


DON'T COUNT ON THAT, MONK. WITH A NAVIGATOR LIKE TARAO, YOU CAN BE SURE THAT THE NAVY WILL SOON BE ON OUR TAILS.

SO, TO SUM UP, YOU'RE ADVISING ME TO RUN AWAY. FOOL. THIS IS MY ISLAND! THE MONK MAY DIE, BUT HE WILL NEVER RUN AWAY!


ALL RIGHT, DIE THEN.
THE MONK RUNS AWAY, BUT HE NEVER DIES!

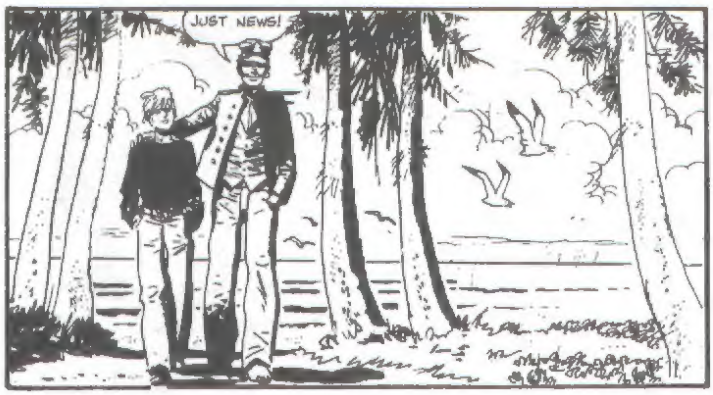

DAMN IT, THERE MUST BE AN ANSWER TO THAT. HALF-DIE THEN, AND HALF-RUN AWAY.
HAW! HAW! HAW! EH! HEE!

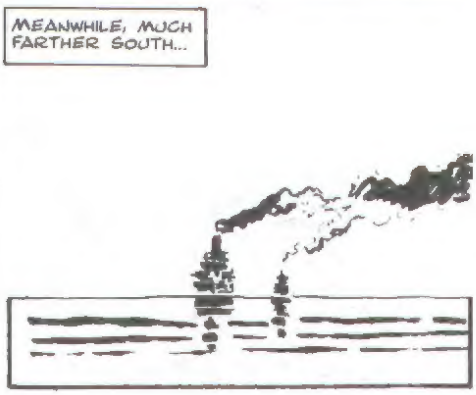
AH, CORTO, CORTO, CORTO. WHAT I LIKE BEST ABOUT YOU IS THE WAY YOU ALWAYS MANAGE TO SEE THE FUNNY SIDE OF THINGS.

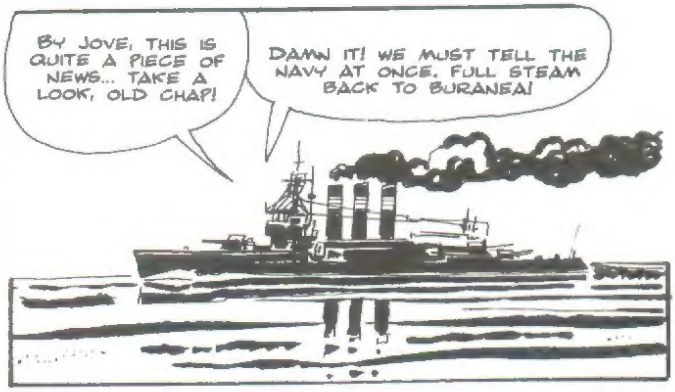
I'M PLEASED TO SEE YOU IN ONE PIECE, CORTO MALTESE!
WELCOME HOME, MONK!

HEY, CAIN, COME DOWN. I'VE GOT SOME NEWS.

WHAT NEWS?


JUST NEWS!


MEANWHILE, MUCH FARTHER SOUTH...

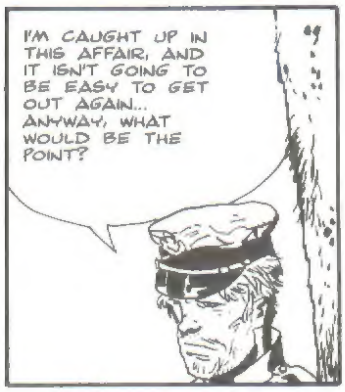

BY JOVE, THIS IS QUITE A PIECE OF NEWS... TAKE A LOOK, OLD CHAP!
DAMN IT! WE MUST TELL THE NAVY AT ONCE. FULL STEAM BACK TO BURANEA!

ON ESCONDIDA...
THANK HEAVENS THE MONK HAS LEFT ME FREE...

...AND DOESN'T BLAME ME FOR PANDORA'S ESCAPE!

HOW ARE THINGS, CAIN?
OH! HELLO, MR SLÜTTER.

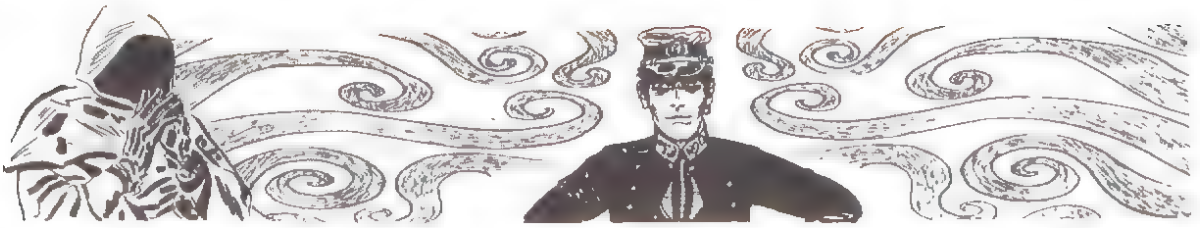
IS SOMETHING WRONG?
OH YES, MY LAD. THE WORST THING THAT COULD HAPPEN TO A MAN!


I'M CAUGHT UP IN THIS AFFAIR, AND IT ISN'T GOING TO BE EASY TO GET OUT AGAIN... ANYWAY, WHAT WOULD BE THE POINT?

VON SPEEKE RAN INTO THE BRITISH OFF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS...

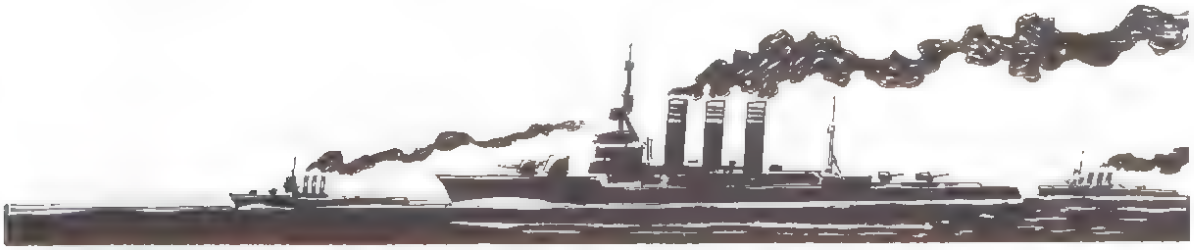
AND YOUR SIDE WON, CAIN!
AH YES, IT MUST BE SNOWING NOW AT HOME, IN LÜBECK...
BUT HERE, THERE IS ONLY THE SUN. SEE YOU SOON, CAIN.
GOODBYE, MR SLÜTTER!
OH! I DIDN'T SEE YOU, CORTO.
WHAT ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT, MR SLÜTTER?
I WAS THINKING ABOUT THE PAST... AND STARTING TO WANDER OFF TOWARDS MY YOUTH. EVEN WITHOUT THINKING ABOUT IT, WE ALL TRY...
...TO RECAPTURE IT ONCE MORE.
BEING LOCKED IN THE PAST IS LIKE KEEPING A CEMETERY.

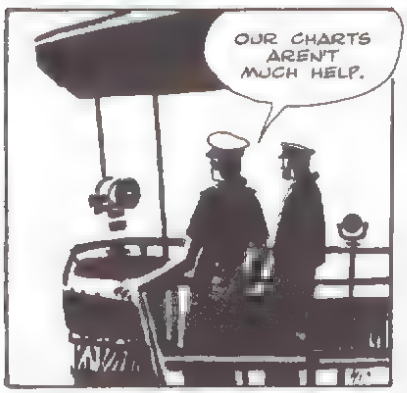
THERE, I BET YOU FEEL BETTER NOW.
WELL, YES..
ANOTHER PIECE OF ADVICE. LOOK AT THOSE PRETTY GIRLS DRESSED IN LEAVES GO AND KEEP THEM COMPANY FOR A WHILE
...YOU DON'T HAVE TO WAIT TILL AUTUMN, SLÜTTER MY FRIEND!
DO YOU KNOW WHAT, CORTO?
YOU'RE ONE PIRATE I LIKE!

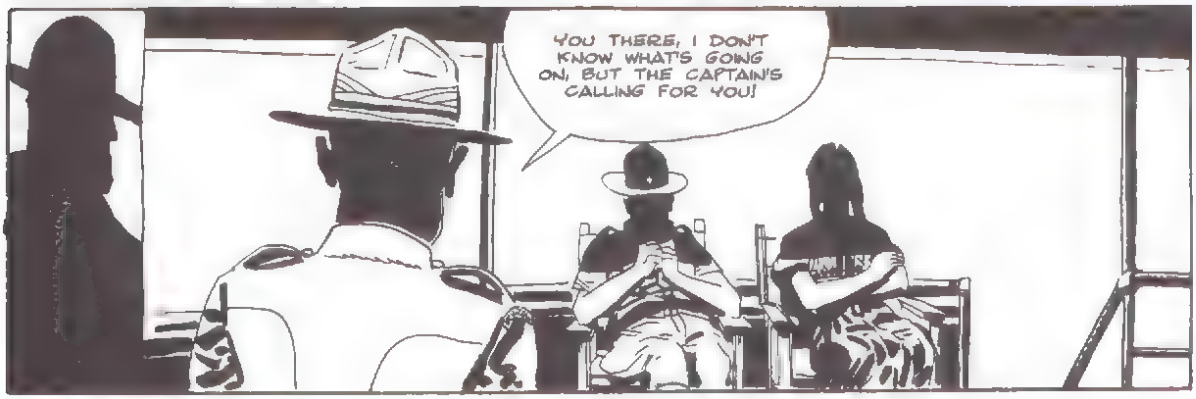


GOODBYE, MR SLUTTER. AND TAKE THE ADVICE OF SOMEONE WHO KNOWS WHAT HE'S TALKING ABOUT. TRY TO GET TO THE END OF THIS ADVENTURE IN ONE PIECE.

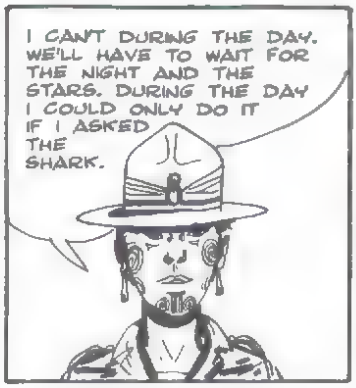
MEANWHILE, A FEW MILES TO THE SOUTH...

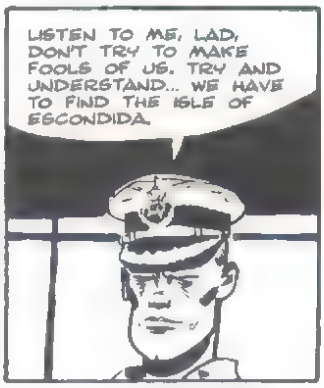


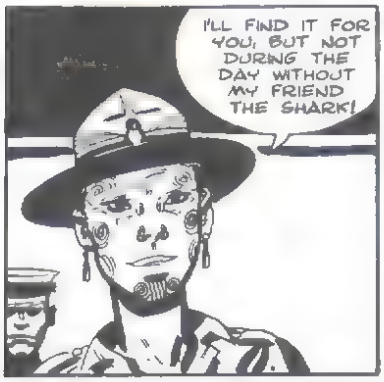


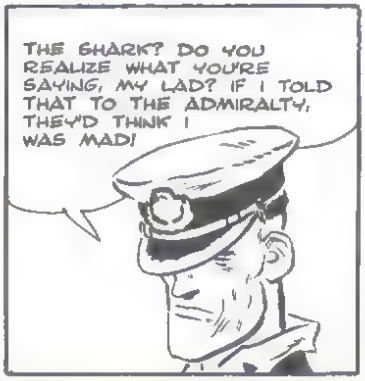


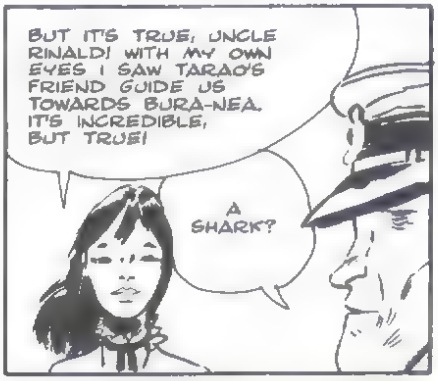
WELL, MY LAD, I CALLED YOU UP HERE SO THAT YOU COULD POINT US TOWARDS ESCONDIDA.


I CAN'T DURING THE DAY. WE'LL HAVE TO WAIT FOR THE NIGHT AND THE STARS. DURING THE DAY I COULD ONLY DO IT IF I ASKED THE SHARK.


LISTEN TO ME, LAD, DON'T TRY TO MAKE FOOLS OF US. TRY AND UNDERSTAND... WE HAVE TO FIND THE ISLE OF ESCONDIDA.

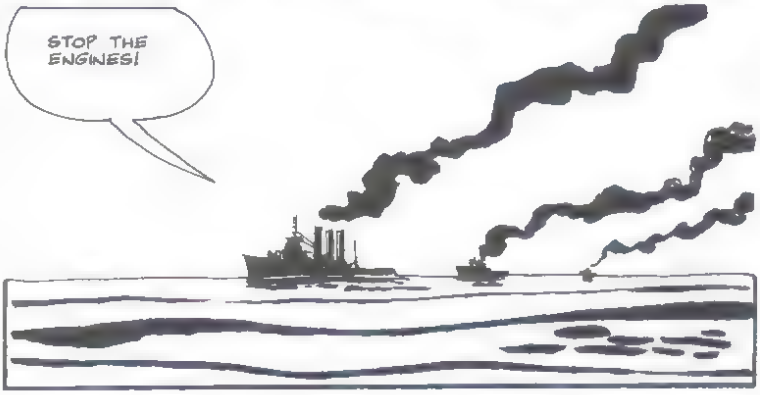

I'LL FIND IT FOR YOU, BUT NOT DURING THE DAY WITHOUT MY FRIEND THE SHARK!

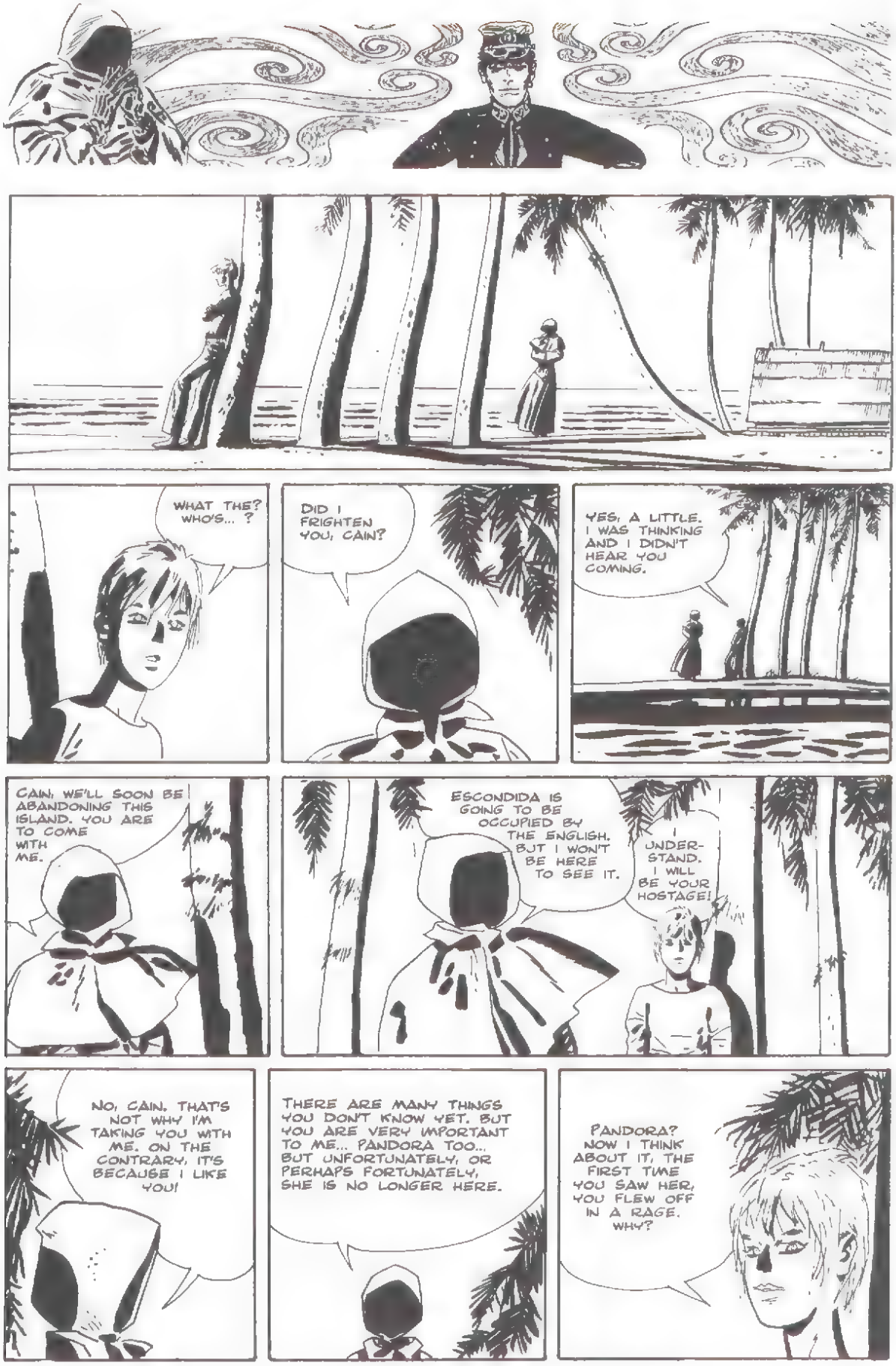

THE SHARK? DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU'RE SAYING, MY LAD? IF I TOLD THAT TO THE ADMIRALTY, THEY'D THINK I WAS MAD!


BUT IT'S TRUE, UNCLE RINALD! WITH MY OWN EYES I SAW TARAO'S FRIEND GUIDE US TOWARDS BURA-NEA. IT'S INCREDIBLE, BUT TRUE!
A SHARK?

YES, A SHARK. I KNOW IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE, UNCLE RINALD.
THAT'S ENOUGH, PANDORA. LET'S LET THE MATTER DROP, SHALL WE? ANYWAY...

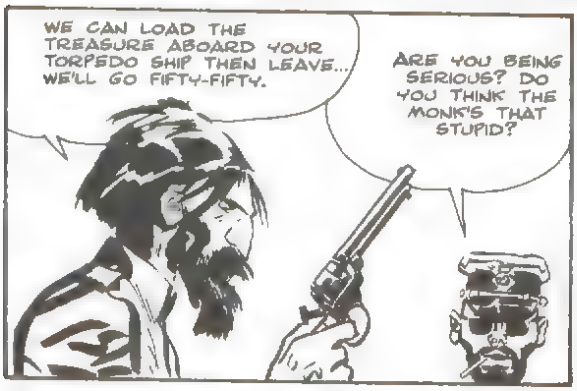
... YOU'RE NOT THE FIRST LUNATIC IN THE FAMILY. WE'LL WAIT FOR NIGHTFALL.

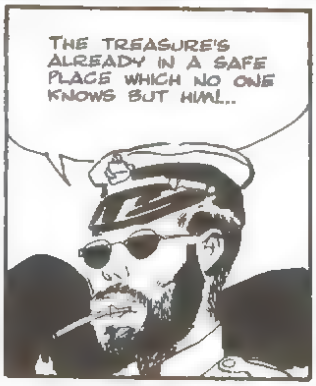

STOP THE ENGINES!

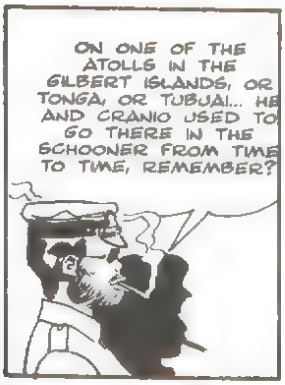

WHAT THE? WHO'S... ?
DID I FRIGHTEN YOU, CAIN?
YES, A LITTLE. I WAS THINKING AND I DIDN'T HEAR YOU COMING.
CAIN, WE'LL SOON BE ABANDONING THIS ISLAND. YOU ARE TO COME WITH ME.
ESCONDIDA IS GOING TO BE OCCUPIED BY THE ENGLISH. BUT I WON'T BE HERE TO SEE IT.
I UNDERSTAND. I WILL BE YOUR HOSTAGE!
NO, CAIN. THAT'S NOT WHY I'M TAKING YOU WITH ME. ON THE CONTRARY, IT'S BECAUSE I LIKE YOU!
THERE ARE MANY THINGS YOU DON'T KNOW YET. BUT YOU ARE VERY IMPORTANT TO ME... PANDORA TOO... BUT UNFORTUNATELY, OR PERHAPS FORTUNATELY, SHE IS NO LONGER HERE.
PANDORA? NOW I THINK ABOUT IT, THE FIRST TIME YOU SAW HER, YOU FLEW OFF IN A RAGE. WHY?

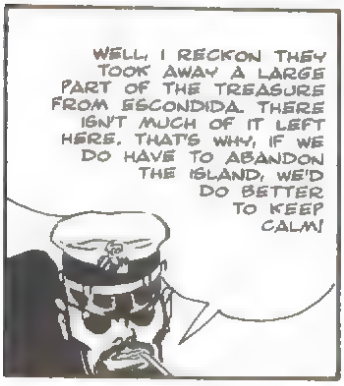
WHY? BECAUSE SHE TOOK ME BACK TO MY YOUTH.. SOMEONE ELSE WAS SUDDENLY THERE IN FRONT OF ME
SOMEONE WHO MEANT EVERYTHING TO ME.. WHO WAS MY LIFE'S PURPOSE.
I DON'T FOLLOW YOU, MONK. PANDORA REMINDED YOU OF SOMEONE... BUT WHO WAS THIS PERSON YOU NEARLY WENT MAD REMEMBERING?
YOUR AUNT MARGRETHA, CAIN... .PANDORA'S MOTHER.
AUNT MAR-GRETHA?
YES, MY LAD. AUNT MARGRETHA. I... WAS VERY MUCH IN LOVE WITH HER!
NOW I UNDER-STAND WHY YOU ASKED ALL THOSE QUESTIONS ABOUT MY FAMILY.
BUT, MONK, WHO REALLY ARE YOU?
WHO KNOWS... FORGET IT, CAIN.

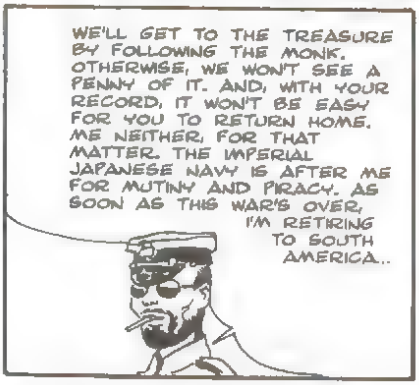
LISTEN TO ME TAKI JAP!

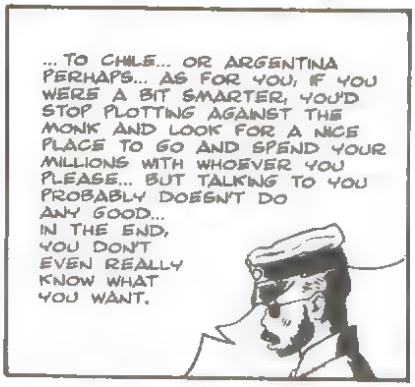

WE CAN LOAD THE TREASURE ABOARD YOUR TORPEDO SHIP THEN LEAVE... WE'LL GO FIFTY-FIFTY.
ARE YOU BEING SERIOUS? DO YOU THINK THE MONK'S THAT STUPID?

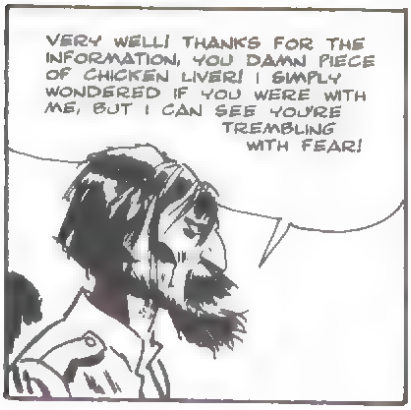

THE TREASURE'S ALREADY IN A SAFE PLACE WHICH NO ONE KNOWS BUT HIM!...

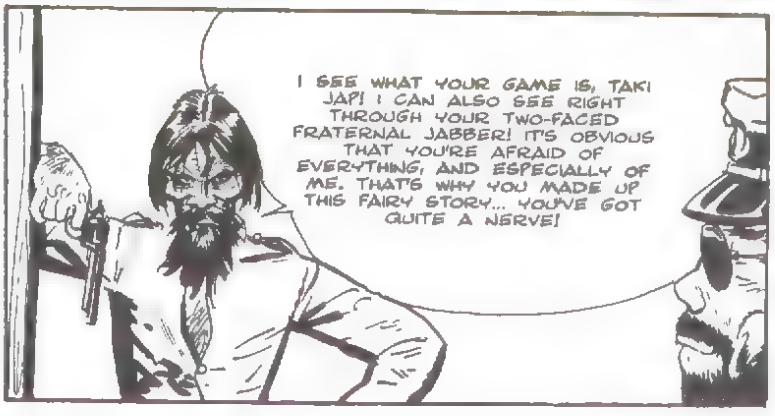

ON ONE OF THE ATOLLS IN THE GILBERT ISLANDS, OR TONGA, OR TUBUAI... HE AND CRANIO USED TO GO THERE IN THE SCHOONER FROM TIME TO TIME, REMEMBER?

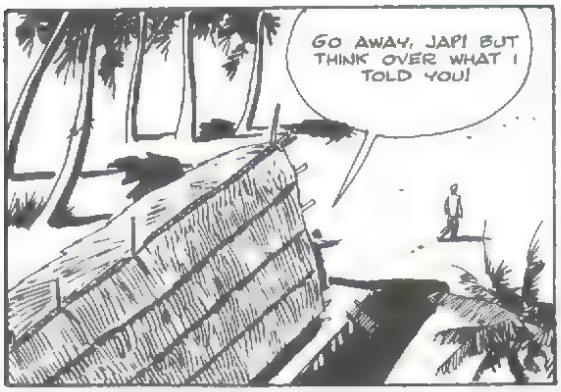

WELL, I RECKON THEY TOOK AWAY A LARGE PART OF THE TREASURE FROM ESCONDIDA. THERE ISN'T MUCH OF IT LEFT HERE. THAT'S WHY, IF WE DO HAVE TO ABANDON THE ISLAND, WE'D DO BETTER TO KEEP CALM!


WE'LL GET TO THE TREASURE BY FOLLOWING THE MONK. OTHERWISE, WE WON'T SEE A PENNY OF IT. AND, WITH YOUR RECORD, IT WON'T BE EASY FOR YOU TO RETURN HOME. ME NEITHER, FOR THAT MATTER. THE IMPERIAL JAPANESE NAVY IS AFTER ME FOR MUTINY AND PIRACY. AS SOON AS THIS WAR'S OVER, I'M RETIRING TO SOUTH AMERICA..


... TO CHILE... OR ARGENTINA PERHAPS... AS FOR YOU, IF YOU WERE A BIT SMARTER, YOU'D STOP PLOTTING AGAINST THE MONK AND LOOK FOR A NICE PLACE TO GO AND SPEND YOUR MILLIONS WITH WHOEVER YOU PLEASE... BUT TALKING TO YOU PROBABLY DOESN'T DO ANY GOOD... IN THE END, YOU DON'T EVEN REALLY KNOW WHAT YOU WANT.

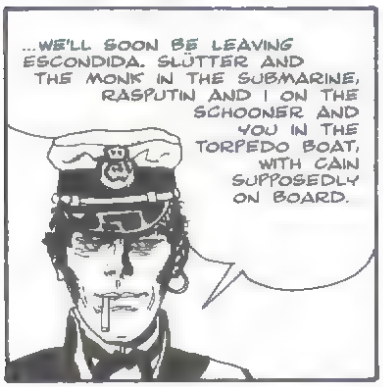

VERY WELL! THANKS FOR THE INFORMATION, YOU DAMN PIECE OF CHICKEN LIVER! I SIMPLY WONDERED IF YOU WERE WITH ME, BUT I CAN SEE YOU'RE TREMBLING WITH FEAR!


I SEE WHAT YOUR GAME IS, TAKI JAP! I CAN ALSO SEE RIGHT THROUGH YOUR TWO-FACED FRATERNAL JABBER! IT'S OBVIOUS THAT YOU'RE AFRAID OF EVERYTHING, AND ESPECIALLY OF ME. THAT'S WHY YOU MADE UP THIS FAIRY STORY... YOU'VE GOT QUITE A NERVE!


GO AWAY, JAP! BUT THINK OVER WHAT I TOLD YOU!

GOOD EVENING, TAKI JAP. EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT?
OH, CORTO MALTESE!

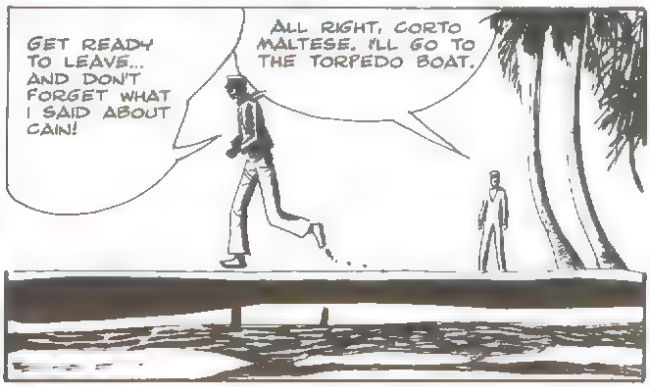
HOW CAN EVERYTHING BE ALL RIGHT WHEN RASPUTIN'S GOING CRAZIER AND CRAZIER? HE'S JUST OFFERED ME HALF THE MONK'S TREASURE IF WE LEAVE TOGETHER!
VERY NICE! WHAT A LOVELY COUPLE YOU'LL MAKE! LISTEN, MY YOUNG BEAUTY


...WE'LL SOON BE LEAVING ESCONDIDA. SLÜTTER AND THE MONK IN THE SUBMARINE, RASPUTIN AND I ON THE SCHOONER AND YOU IN THE TORPEDO BOAT, WITH CAIN SUPPOSEDLY ON BOARD.

...I SAID "SUPPOSEDLY ON BOARD", BECAUSE YOU'RE GOING TO LEAVE HIM BEHIND. I DON'T WANT THE LAD INVOLVED IN THIS ADVENTURE. HE'LL BE PICKED UP BY HIS PEOPLE HERE AND GO BACK TO HIS FAMILY. HIS LIFE SHOULDN'T BE PUT AT RISK.

..WHILE YOU'LL BE RISKING YOURS IF YOU DON'T DO WHAT I SAY!
AH! BUT YOU'RE ALL AGAINST ME. THE DEVIL TAKE THE LOT OF YOU!

A FLARE! THEY'VE FOUND OUR ISLAND. IT'S THE BRITISH, AND THEY'RE HERE SOONER THAN EXPECTED!
WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

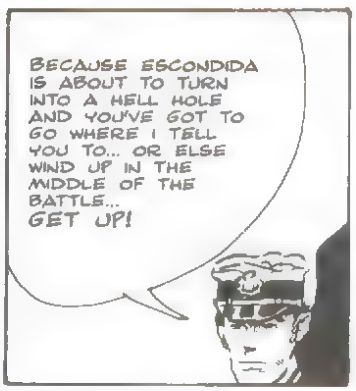

GET READY TO LEAVE... AND DON'T FORGET WHAT I SAID ABOUT CAIN!
ALL RIGHT, CORTO MALTESE. I'LL GO TO THE TORPEDO BOAT.

CAIN! CAIN!

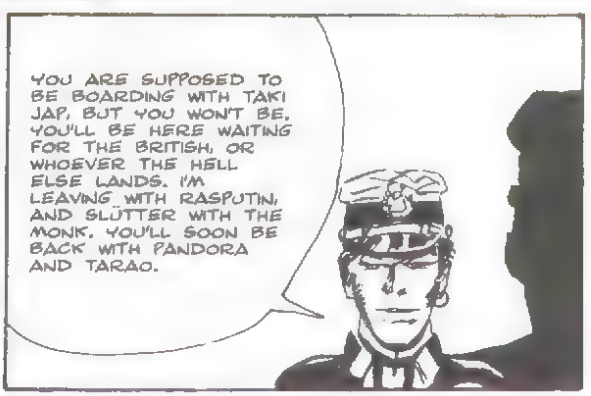
IT'S ME! GET UP, QUICKLY!
B-BUT, WHAT'S GOING ON? ANYTHING IMPORTANT?

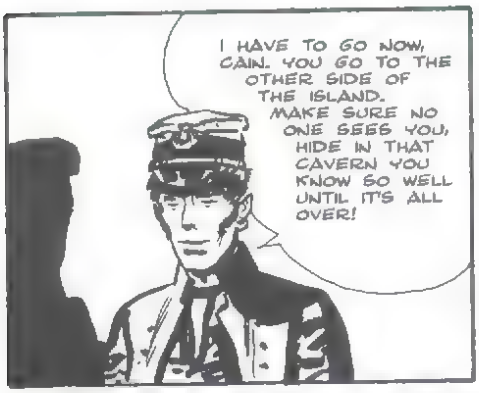
YOU DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME, CAIN. YOU HAVE TO GO, RUN AWAY! I'M RISKING MY LIFE TO HELP YOU, SO DON'T MISS YOUR CHANCE!

HEY, JUST A SECOND! WHY SHOULD I RUN AWAY? AND WHY NOW, TONIGHT?

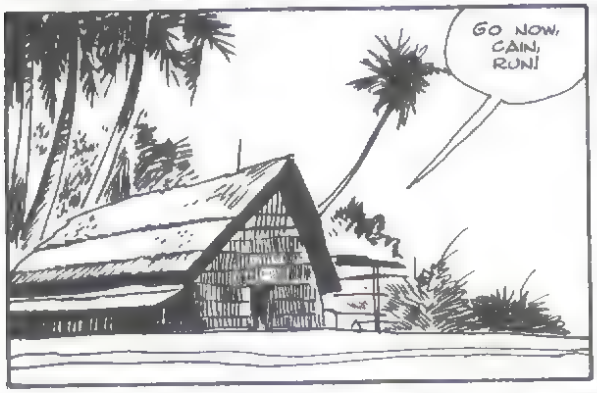

BECAUSE ESCONDIDA IS ABOUT TO TURN INTO A HELL HOLE AND YOU'VE GOT TO GO WHERE I TELL YOU TO... OR ELSE WIND UP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE BATTLE... GET UP!

CORTO, I DON'T UNDERSTAND..
THE ALLIES ARE ABOUT TO LAND HERE!


YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO BE BOARDING WITH TAKI JAP, BUT YOU WON'T BE. YOU'LL BE HERE WAITING FOR THE BRITISH, OR WHOEVER THE HELL ELSE LANDS. I'M LEAVING WITH RASPUTIN, AND SLUTTER WITH THE MONK. YOU'LL SOON BE BACK WITH PANDORA AND TARAO.


I HAVE TO GO NOW, CAIN. YOU GO TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ISLAND. MAKE SURE NO ONE SEES YOU, HIDE IN THAT CAVERN YOU KNOW SO WELL UNTIL IT'S ALL OVER!

BE BRAVE, MY FRIEND... WE MAY MEET AGAIN SOMEWHERE SOME DAY, IN BETTER TIMES... FAREWELL, CAIN!
FAREWELL, CORTO MALTESE! AND THANK YOU.. WHO KNOWS, PERHAPS FATE WILL HAVE US MEET AGAIN?


GO NOW, CAIN, RUN!

LET'S HOPE EVERYTHING WORKS OUT FOR THE LAD. THERE'S NO TIME TO LOSE. I MUST GO AND SEE THE MONK.

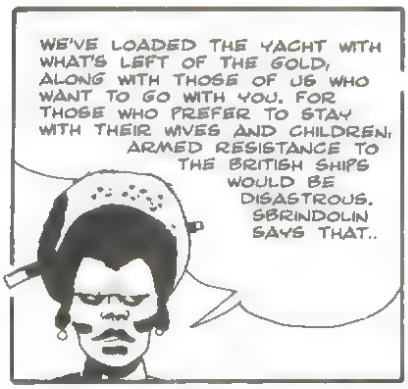
SHORTLY..
HAVE YOU BEEN INFORMED YET, MONK?
YES, EVERYTHING'S READY. WE CAN GO!

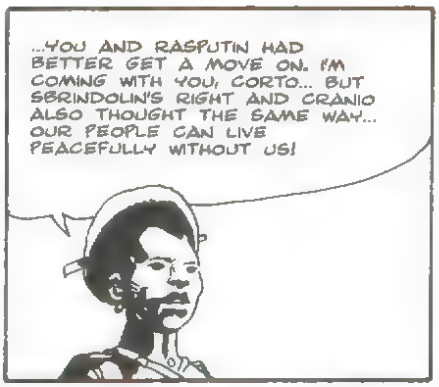
WHEN THEY LAND TOMORROW, THEY WON'T FIND A SOUL AND WE'LL BE HEADING FOR PITCAIRN. EVERYTHING WILL GO AS PLANNED. GOODBYE, CORTO MALTESE!

I MUST FIND RASPUTIN. WITH HIM, ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN.

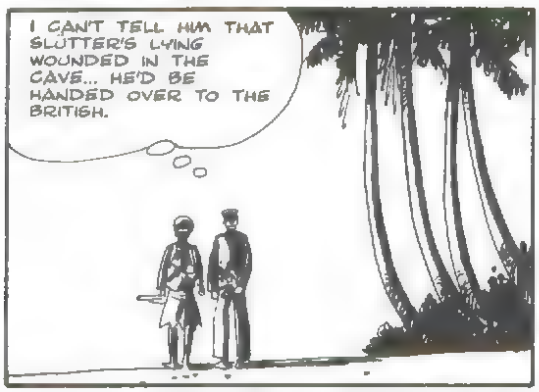
BANG!
A PISTOL SHOT! WHO FIRED IT?
THE BLAST CAME FROM THE PATH THAT LEADS TO THE MONK'S HOUSE.
HELL'S TEETH! I'M RUNNING FROM ONE SIDE OF THE ISLAND TO THE OTHER. AND NO ONE'S EVEN MAKING ME DO IT!
SLÜTTER, SLÜTTER!
WHO WAS IT?
THE MONK. SAVE MY MEN!
HE MEANS TO TAKE COMMAND OF THE SUBMARINE. HE'S GOING TO KILL ALL MY SEAMEN.
RATTRAT
RATTRATTAT.!
RATTRATT!
RATTRATT.!
TOO LATE, SLUTTER.
BUT I'LL SAVE YOU, SO THAT YOU CAN AVENGE THEM!

CAIN! CAIN!!
CAIN?
HE ISN'T HERE. SO WHERE IS HE? BUT I'LL HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF SLÜTTER FIRST.
THIS IS GOING TO HURT A BIT. DON'T MOVE!
OR YOU'LL NEVER GET YOUR NAME IN THE NIBELUNGEN SAGA!
OUCH!
THERE, SLÜTTER'S OUT OF DANGER. HE SHOULD MAKE IT NOW.. BUT, WHO'S THIS?
HEY, CORTO MALTESE, WHERE WERE YOU? I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU FOR THE LAST TWO HOURS!
I WANTED TO TELL YOU THAT SBRINDOLIN HAS BEEN PROCLAIMED KING OF ESCONDIDA. THE MONK AND TAKI JAP HAVE ALREADY GONE, THERE'S ONLY YOU AND RASPUTIN LEFT!

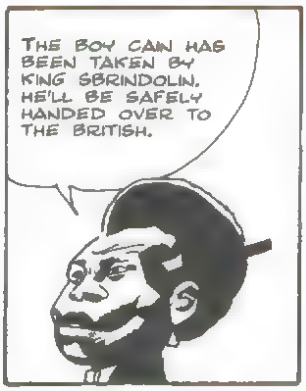

WE'VE LOADED THE YACHT WITH WHAT'S LEFT OF THE GOLD, ALONG WITH THOSE OF US WHO WANT TO GO WITH YOU. FOR THOSE WHO PREFER TO STAY WITH THEIR WIVES AND CHILDREN, ARMED RESISTANCE TO THE BRITISH SHIPS WOULD BE DISASTROUS. SBRINDOLIN SAYS THAT..


...YOU AND RASPUTIN HAD BETTER GET A MOVE ON. I'M COMING WITH YOU, CORTO... BUT SBRINDOLIN'S RIGHT AND CRANIO ALSO THOUGHT THE SAME WAY... OUR PEOPLE CAN LIVE PEACEFULLY WITHOUT US!

OH YES, YOU'RE RIGHT. WE'D BETTER GO AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. COME ON!

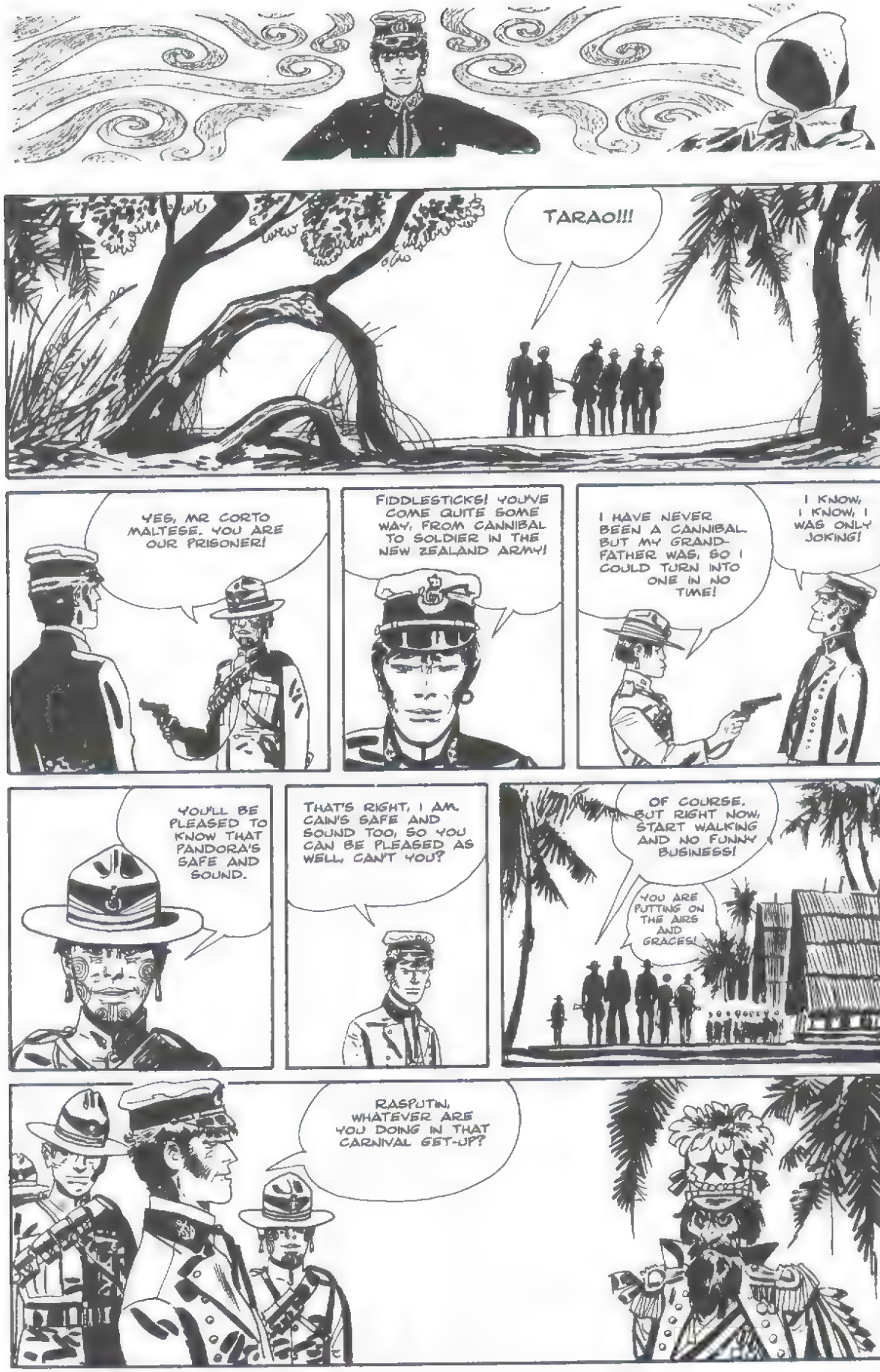

I CAN'T TELL HIM THAT SLUTTER'S LYING WOUNDED IN THE CAVE... HE'D BE HANDED OVER TO THE BRITISH.

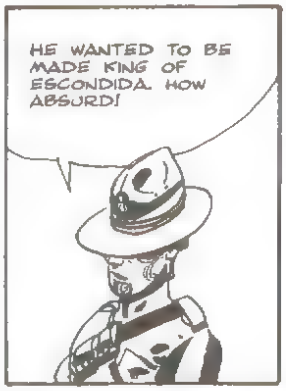
BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, I CAN HARDLY TAKE HIM WITH ME... MAMMA MIA! I'M ACTING LIKE A WET NURSE!


THE BOY CAN HAS BEEN TAKEN BY KING SBRINDOLIN. HE'LL BE SAFELY HANDED OVER TO THE BRITISH.

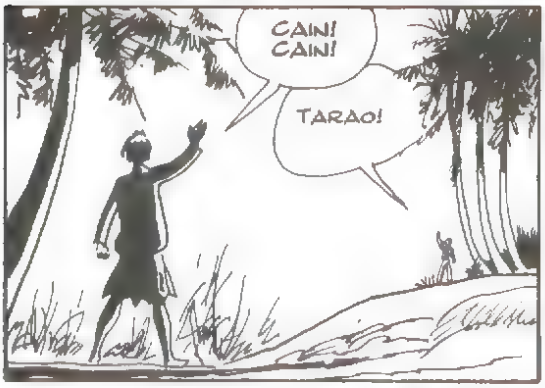
STOP THERE! THIS IS A NEW ZEALAND PATROL!

I KNOW THAT VOICE. IF IT'S WHO I THINK IT IS, WE'D BETTER OBEY.
I KNOW WHO IT IS!


TARAO!!!
YES, MR CORTO MALTESE. YOU ARE OUR PRISONER!
FIDDLESTICKS! YOU'VE COME QUITE SOME WAY, FROM CANNIBAL TO SOLDIER IN THE NEW ZEALAND ARMY!
I HAVE NEVER BEEN A CANNIBAL. BUT MY GRANDFATHER WAS, SO I COULD TURN INTO ONE IN NO TIME!
I KNOW, I KNOW, I WAS ONLY JOKING!
YOU'LL BE PLEASED TO KNOW THAT PANDORA'S SAFE AND SOUND.
THAT'S RIGHT, I AM. CAIN'S SAFE AND SOUND TOO, SO YOU CAN BE PLEASED AS WELL, CAN'T YOU?
OF COURSE. BUT RIGHT NOW, START WALKING AND NO FUNNY BUSINESS!
YOU ARE PUTTING ON THE AIRS AND GRACES!
RASPUTIN, WHATEVER ARE YOU DOING IN THAT CARNIVAL GET-UP?



SHORTLY
SO, MY JOB AS A SCOUT AND SOLDIER FOR THE NEW ZEALAND EXPEDITIONARY FORCE ENDS HERE. WHERE'S CAIN?
YOU'LL FIND HIM ON THE NORTH CAPE. HE'S WAITING FOR THE LANDING.



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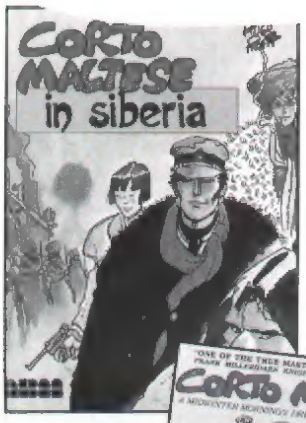

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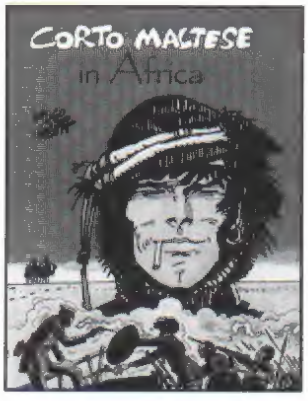

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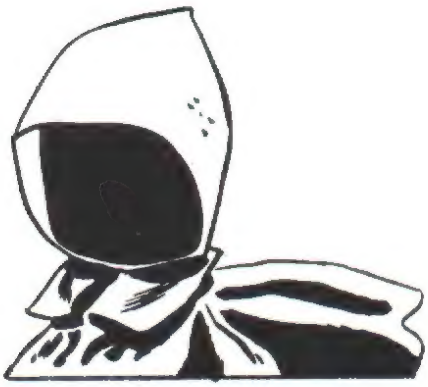

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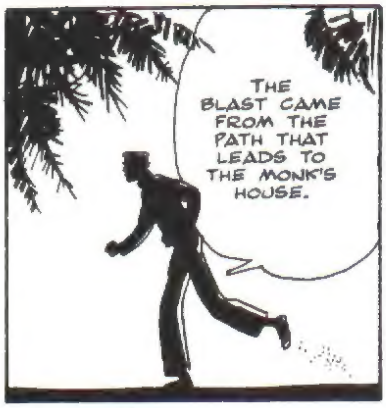
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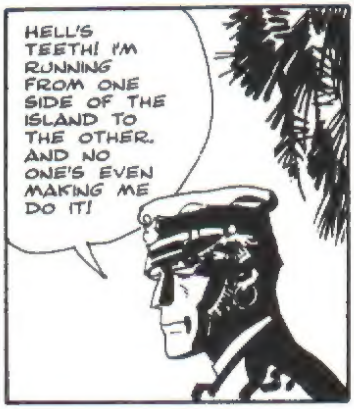
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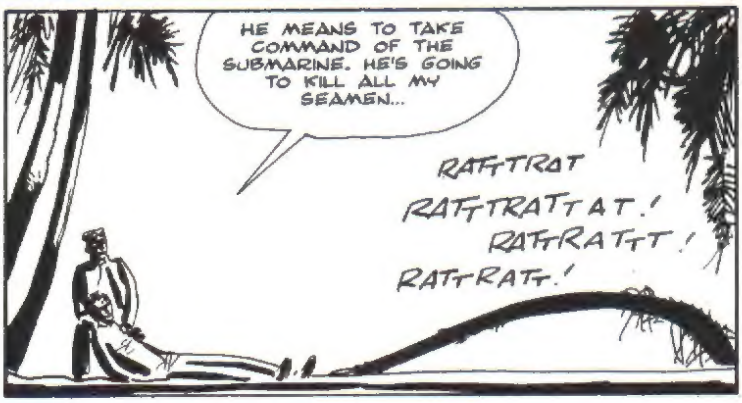
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